Teaching and learning foreign languages in Uzbekistan. CEFR: learning, teaching and assessment

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ABSTRACT

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is the most comprehensive, and the most widely used set of foreign language education standards throughout the world. The recent reforms in foreign language teaching in Uzbekistan have mainly touched upon teaching English language in all levels and stages of education. At this point CEFR plays as the main framework to be adopted in developing the national standard. In this article, we shall discuss reforms of adoption and implementation of the new standard which was a requirement of time and has started a new era in the whole system of foreign languages learning in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: CEFR, teaching, learning, assessment, CEFR levels, education, stages of education, foreign language.

1. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of 2000's marked a new era in foreign languages teaching in Uzbekistan when all stakeholders including teachers, students, schools, colleges, lyceums and universities started to feel the changes in the way of foreign languages were taught and learned. (Jalolov 2015). In order to provide effective higher education, Uzbekistan accepted significant reforms by performing use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in the country. CEFR standards provide effective learning of foreign language EFL classes. Both projects will take part in the implementation of Presidential Decree № 1875 of December of 2012 in enhancement of the teaching and learning of foreign languages in order to strengthen the communication skills and international effect of future Uzbekistan specialists in all fields. The mentioned Decrees of the President criticize the need to make state educational standards, curricula and other educational documents responsive to the needs of teachers and language learners, to align national educational standards with those of international standards and make a shift from teacher-centered classroom to learner-centered classroom where language learners are provided with more autonomy in learning and to link foreign language teacher education programs in Uzbekistan to international standards. National Educational Standard for Continuing Education System on Foreign Languages decided to develop and implement totally new concept of national standards which could provide continuity and consistency of teaching foreign languages in all levels of education system. And at this point the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) played as the main framework to be adopted in developing the national standard. (See the table 4). The implementation of the project on the development of the national curricula and standard on the teaching and learning of foreign languages was started along with the project aiming at the reform of PRESETT and INSETT system of Uzbekistan. According to Irisqulov (2015) adoption and implementation of the new standard was a requirement of time and started a new era in the whole system of foreign languages learning in Uzbekistan.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Overview of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which is commonly referred as CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) is considered as an innovative language policy document designed and developed by the language policy division of the Council of Europe in the 1990s. The CEFR facilitates cooperation among various educational institutions and educational and other stakeholders around the world, moreover,

providing easier mobility opportunities for professionals and common citizens across countries (Council of Europe, 2001). Goullier (2007) and North (2007) suggest that the CEFR is a descriptive document, rather than a prescriptive document. In other words it refers and can be used with all languages and its primary goal is to enhance language practitioners' reflections on their specific educational and geographical contexts, language learners and language teaching objectives. According to North (2007, p. 656) the CEFR is defined as a "concertina-like reference tool, not an instrument to be applied". Therefore, it should be referred, consulted and adapted depending on the needs and realities of a definite local area rather than blindly followed as a set of concrete unchangeable and discrete rulesIt was published online in 1996 and in 2001 it was introduced in a paper version. Since its gaining popularity around world the CEFR document has been translated into 39 languages and has been used and/or referred by a number of countries around the world for the development and introduction of foreign language policies, including Uzbekistan. As it is declared by the Council of Europe the main purpose of the CEFR is the alignment of language learning, teaching, assessment and testing and ultimately guarantee correlation of learning outcomes across languages, contexts and countries. The document "provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc." (Council of Europe, 2001 p1). The development of the CEFR coincided with fundamental changes in language teaching, with the move away from the grammar-translation method to communicative approach. That is to say, the document is considered to act as a tool that can "be used to analyze L2 learners' needs, specify L2 learning goals, guide the development of L2 learning materials and activities, and provide orientation for the assessment of L2 learning outcomes" (Little, 2006, p167), and in coherent and comprehensible way. The CEFR 1 - depicts competencies language learners need to form to be an effective language user; 2 – it suggests sets of "can do" descriptors that point out what learners can do when they reach a certain competency in a definite proficiency level; 3 – it offers instructional guiding principles on how to teach and assess learners competencies; 4 - it offers a common reference level scales for the comparability and recognition of language competences across contexts and countries. (see the table N1)

The CEFR provides a reference point for language competency around the world as in the Table N1:

Global CEFR scale		General Level	TOEFL (ICT)	Cambridge ESOL Level	IELTS Level
Proficient User	C2	Advanced		CPE	IELTS 7-8
	C1	Upper-Intermediate	233-270	CAE/BEC/Higher	IELTS 6-7
Independent User	B2	Intermediate/Upper Intermediate	152-213	FCE/BEC Vantage	IELTS 5-6
	B1	Pre-Intermediate	100-133	PET/BEC Preliminary	IELTS 4
Basic User	A2	Elementary	40-85	KET	IELTS 3
	A1	Beginner	-	Starters, Movers, Flyers	IELTS 0-2

The CEFR reflects international standards for learning, teaching, and assessment for all modern European languages. CEFR describes what a learner can do at six specific levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. (see the table N1.)

The competences are classified into six levels of proficiency, as is shown in Table N2:

C2	Proficient User
C1	
B2	Independent User
B1	
A1	Basic User

These levels match general concepts of basic, intermediate, and advanced and are often referred to as the Global Scale. For each level, the full CEFR document complements this by describing in depth
• Competencies necessary for effective communication.
• Skills and knowledge related to language learning and competencies.

• Situations (people, place, time, organization, etc.) and contexts (study, work, social, tourism, etc.) in which communication takes place. The Global Scale is not language-specific. In other words, it can be used with virtually any language and can be used to compare achievement and learning across languages. For example, an A2 in Spanish is the same as an A2 in Japanese or English. The Global Scale also helps teachers, academic coordinators, and course book writers to decide on curriculum and syllabus content and to choose appropriate course books, etc.

"Can do" statements The Global Scale is based on a set of statements that describe what a learner can do. The "can do" statements are always positive: they describe what a learner is able to do, not what a learner cannot do or does wrong. This helps all learners, even those at the lowest levels and that learning has value and that they can attain language goals. (see the table N 3)

The detailed global descriptions for the levels range from C2 to A1 in Global CEFR Scales in Table N3

Proficient User	**C2**	• Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. • Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. • Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	• Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. • Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. • Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. • Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	**B2**	• Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. • Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. • Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	• Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. • Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. • Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. • Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	**A2**	• Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). • Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. • Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

A1	• Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. • Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. • Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

As mentioned before in this guide, one of the main concerns of teachers is how long it takes to reach each level. At first glance, the CEFR appears to be like a staircase with each step the same distance from the next (A1 to A2 to B1 to B2, etc.). This might seem to indicate that each step or level should be achieved in an equal amount of time. The following number of guided teaching hours needed to fulfill the aims of each CEFR level:

A1 Approximately 90 - 100 hours
A2 Approximately 180 - 200 hours
B1 Approximately 350 - 400 hours
B2 Approximately 500 - 600 hours
C1 Approximately 700 - 800 hours
C2 Approximately 1,000 - 1,200 hours

Guided teaching hours are the hours during which the learner is in a formal learning context such as the classroom. The number of hours needed for different learners varies greatly, depending on a range of factors such as a) age and motivation; b) background; c) amount of prior study and extent of exposure to the language outside the classroom; d) amount of time spent in individual study

How the CEFR approach will affect teachers of foreign languages and students studying different specialties in Higher Education and secondary specialized Education or in Public Education in Uzbekistan.

Stages of teaching and learning foreign languages according to the new national standard based on the CEFR

Stages of education	Graduates	CEFR	Name of the level
General Secondary Education	Primary (4th grade) level graduates	A1	Beginner level of foreign language learning
	9th grade graduates	A2	Basic level of foreign language learning
	9th grade graduates of school specializing in foreign languages learning	A2+	Reinforced basic level of foreign language learning
Secondary specialized and vocational education	Graduates of non-specialized academic lyceums	B1	Independent beginner level of foreign language learning
	Vocational colleges		
	Graduates of academic lyceums specializing in foreign language teaching (second foreign language)		

	Graduates of academic lyceums specializing in foreign languages	B1+	Reinforced independent beginner level of foreign language learning
Higher education	Baccalaureate level graduates of non-specialized faculties	B2	Independent communication level of foreign language learning
	Master level graduates of non-specialized faculties		
	Baccalaureate level graduates of faculties specializing in foreign language teaching (second foreign language)		
	Baccalaureate level graduates of faculties specializing in foreign language teaching	C1	Proficient level of foreign language learning
	Master level graduates of faculties specializing in foreign language teaching		

3. CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan has already established teaching English language in all levels and stages of education based on CEFR as the main framework to be adopted in developing the national standard. Graduate learners of Uzbekistan educational system who are able to communicate as fluently and proficiently as possible in English so that language communication skills make them more employable and better to undertake further study and research in their further career.

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